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OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF CONJURING
IN GEORGIA.

THE collection of beliefs relating to witchcraft which is furnished below, and which has been obtained from informants whose confidence I have acquired, may be introduced by some account of my personal experience with "cunjers."

A family of negroes consisting of husband, wife, and son applied to me at my plantation near Waynesboro, Ga., for work. The man and woman were well advanced in years and both of the pure negro type. The woman asked that I would give them a house as far removed from others as possible, which request seemed to me rather odd, as most negroes prefer living together, or near each other. They worked as well as the average negro, and I had no cause to complain. A few months after their arrival, when they were firmly established and were well acquainted with the neighborhood, it began to be rumored about that Hattie McGahee, the woman, was a root doctress, could relieve pains, cure diseases, foretell events, bring about estrangement between husband and wife, or effect reconciliations. She had as assistants in the occult art a perfectly black dog and cat, which were regarded as evil spirits, perhaps as Satan himself. Upon the same plantation were two negroes, Joe Coleman and Henry Jenkins, both of whom were seeking to win the affections of a young negress named Laura Jones. Henry Jenkins sought the assistance of Hattie McGahee, while Joe Coleman procured as advisor and friend a celebrated negro root doctor called Hosey Lightfoot. The black cat or dog was brought into service by furnishing a few hairs which were burned with some sassafras sticks and as a powder administered in food to Laura. The plantation was divided as to the suitors for the hand of Laura, and Hattie declared open war against all those espousing the cause of Joe Coleman. Cross marks and graveyard dirt, or small bundles of tied-up sticks, were found lying in the paths leading to the houses of the respective rivals, and many of the negroes refused to work in the same field with Hattie and her husband. Every headache or other pain, or even diseases common to the climate, were laid to the account of the different doctors. I once found a large pile of cotton lying in the field, which the negroes refused to take out, claiming that Hattie McGahee had put a spell on it. Negroes would not even walk in the paths that Hattie used, fearing the effect of some spell. Matters were at a fever-heat until a crisis was reached in the killing of Hattie McGahee's dog, which was ascribed to Joe Coleman and his friends. When the principals with their friends met to settle the difficulty personally, the result

was that Henry Jenkins was fearfully mutilated with an axe, Joe Coleman suffered a fearful beating with sticks, while others of the respective parties escaped with more or less personal injury. Joe Coleman, the aggressor, was sent to the chain gang by the county court for six months. While he was serving out his term, Henry Jenkins recovered from his injuries, and married Laura. Shortly after the difficulty, the father of Joe Coleman was kicked by a mule and killed; his death was laid at the door of Hattie McGahee, the negroes believing that she used some spell over the mule, making him kill Lewis Coleman, the father of Joe. Since I left Waynesboro, Henry Jenkins and another negro had a difficulty, in which both were killed, about the same Laura Jones whom he married. I immediately discharged the whole McGahee family, saving the young son, who refused to go with his mother and father. Wherever she went, still pursuing the calling of a dealer in the occult science, trouble followed in her wake. Hattie could interpret dreams, was a weather prophet, and in short completely proficient in her art.

Those following the profession of "cunjer doctor" rarely remain in one place for a long time, and generally wish their homes far removed from other habitations. When their work becomes known and its effect felt, for the peace of all, master as well as man, it is necessary to remove them from the place.

In 1896, upon my plantation near Grovetown, Ga., I secured as cook the services of a mulatto woman by the name of Jane Jackson, who was highly recommended. She and her husband lived in the yard. At the same time I employed as milkwoman Anna Bonney, whose husband, Jim Bonney, attended to the lot. An estrangement between Anna and Jane soon produced the following disastrous results. Anna would complain about Jane, Jane in turn would accuse Anna of taking the milk. One morning at breakfast, my brother and myself, upon drinking a little of the coffee in our cups, were made violently sick. Of course Jane was questioned very closely in regard to it; but I soon became convinced that she was not the guilty party. We never could explain the coffee incident, having failed to analyze the coffee. A negro told me that he thought powdered pecune root was put in the coffee, as it is a powerful emetic. Though Anna milked, Jane churned, and every effort to make butter failed. Jane said that Anna had put a spell on the milk. Anna retorted by saying that Jane put something in the milk to prevent the butter coming, so that she, Anna, could be discharged. Chickens about the yard began to die, the water in the well had a peculiar taste, little bundles of sticks were found in the kitchen as well as in the cow lot, graveyard dirt served its purpose in various ways and in many places. Having stopped using water

out of the well, we had all the water used for drinking and culinary purposes brought from a spring that was a short distance from the house. Very soon sticks of various lengths, "devil's snuff" and graveyard dirt, was found strewed along the path to the spring. Our milk cow prematurely going dry, and a fine calf dying at the lot, together with the fact that Jim Bonney and his wife Anna were seen by a negro, Steve Olley, at midnight making repeated circuits around the well, and motioning with their hands towards the house occupied by Jane Jackson. Upon the negroes telling me of the walk around the well, I determined to make a clean sweep of everybody, and discharged all hands in any way concerned in the matter. It was with great difficulty, while all this "cunjer" was going on, that I could get any one to enter the yard in order to perform the slightest offices. Negroes would use neither axe nor hoes kept at the yard, but would bring their own, and take them away as soon as the work was finished. Some would not even pass through the yard. When a hen was put to setting, she rarely brought off chickens. Shortly after the discharge of all parties, John Jackson, the husband of Jane Jackson, was seen, when passing on a path, to motion three times towards Anna Bonney's house. Anna was standing in the yard at the time the motions were made, and fell in convulsions. She was taken into the house, where she lingered for some weeks, and died. Her death was laid at the door of Jane Jackson. Before using the well, I had it thoroughly cleaned out, and red pepper thrown in, as well as into and under the house that was occupied by Jane Jackson, before I could get other negroes to occupy the premises, or use the water from the well. It can be well understood from the foregoing, how this matter of "cunjer," in designing hands, can work evil to the innocent. Jane and Anna, with the assistance of their husbands, were fighting a battle royal against each other. Yet I and other innocent people had parts to play in this drama.

HOW CUNJER DOCTORS GET PATIENTS.

(From Henry Thomas.)

Two miles from Grovetown, Ga., lived an old widowed negro woman, Sarah Davis, who had accumulated quite a sum of money. She was very close, and would neither lend nor give. A sharp negro, learning that she was sick, put the following scheme in execution to get some of it. He went along the path that led to the spring, and found a convenient spot for his purpose, dug a hole, put in it a small bottle containing human hair, some graveyard dirt, and two small sticks; he covered up the holes, throwing leaves over the surface of the ground to conceal his work. He then went into the house, where he found the old woman quite sick, her son and daugh-

ters were with her. After talking with her for some time, asking particularly the nature of her complaint, as to pain, etc., he plainly told her she was under a spell, or cunjered. He told her the cunjrer was near her house, and that if she would give him ten dollars he would find it, break the spell, and cure her; if he did not find it, no pay. He asked that the son and daughter accompany him in the search, which proposition seemed fair enough. He told them he had with him a rod that could find it. He, with the son and daughter, began the search. He did not go on the spring path when he began the search for the cunjrer, but went about the yard in opposite directions, holding in his hands the rod, a small piece of rod-iron about twelve inches long; he held the rod firmly in both hands, a hand holding each end of the rod. After searching the yard thoroughly, with no success, he went towards the lot where the mules were kept, with no better luck; the rod would not turn. At last he turned his face toward the spring, and slowly walked along, no one speaking a word. When he neared the spot where he had put the bottle, the rod began to show signs of life; when he got within two feet of the spot, the rod acted very excitedly. He sent the son after a hoe and shovels, made a circle about four feet in diameter, and began digging. He gradually approached the bottle, then began very carefully to take away a little dirt at a time, till at last he unearthed the bottle; the son and daughter were speechless. He took the bottle to the old woman, who was much relieved and paid the ten dollars, and then gave her some roots to chew. The bottle, after being broken, was buried in the middle of the public road. The old woman recovered, and, though the trick was exposed, still believes she was cunjered, and cured by the doctor.

A CUNJERER.

Tom Franklin is supposed to be a "cunjrer." Whenever he comes into a house, he always puts his hands in his pockets, then on a chair, or table, or bed. When he does this, something always happens to the household. Negroes think he carries graveyard dirt, and works his spells by it. They say he works entirely with graveyard dirt, that he knows the time to get it. He was the cause of a negro named Alex Johnson giving up a farm and moving off the place; he put graveyard dirt under Alex's house, and made him very ill. Alex saw the dirt, and what he could get of it he took with a shovel and threw in a fire he had made in the road. Some he could n't get, as it kept sinking into the ground.

Tom Franklin is also a root doctor, and practices; he collects roots at different stages of the moon.

(Account of Alex Johnson.)

I was cunjered last May, 1898. I felt the first pain, hoeing in the field; it struck me in the right foot, and then in the left, but most in the right foot, then run over my whole body, and rested in my head; I went home, and knew I was cunjered. I looked for the cunj-er, found a little bag under my front doorstep, containing graveyard dirt, some night-shade roots, and some devil's snuff, took the bag, and dug a hole in the middle of the public road, where people walked and buried the bag, and sprinkled red pepper and sulphur in my house. I have used fresh urine, pepper, and salt to rub with; am going to get fresh pokeberry root on the next new moon, make a tea, and rub with it. My feet feel hot, the cunj-er put a fire in them; am going to see a new root-doctor, and find out who *worked* on me, have the spell tuk off of me, and put on the person who *spelled* me.

AN AFRICAN WIZARD.

Many years ago an old African, or Guinea negro, who was a trainer of race-horses, and hanger-on of the sporting ring, claimed to be a conjurer and wizard, professing to have derived the art from the Indians after he arrived in this country from Africa. This power he never used criminally against any one, but only in controlling riotous gatherings, commanding forgiveness from parties threatening him with personal violence; would cause runaway slaves to return to their masters, foretell the time they would appear and give themselves up, and compel their masters or overseers to pardon and forgive them for the offense of running away, even against their own threats of severe punishment when caught.

By rubbing any race-horse in a peculiar and secret way he would insure him to be a winner while under his training, and claimed to be able to make cards, dice, and other games subject to his will.

ITEMS RELATING TO CUNJER.

(From various informants.)

To cunj-er a well, throw into the well graveyard dirt, an old pipe of a cunj-er doctor, or some devil's snuff.

Devil's snuff, a large species of mushroom, when broken, is full of a powder of a slatish color, and is used in cunj-er, singly or in combination with graveyard dirt and other things.

If a person is cunj-ered by a negro with a blue and a black eye, he will surely die.

If cunj-ered by a blue-gummed negro, death is certain.

To produce blindness by cunj-er, take a toad-frog and dry it, then powder it up, and mix with salt, and sprinkle in the hat of the person to be cunj-ered, or on the head if possible; when the head sweats, and the sweat runs down the face, blindness takes place.

Wherever any one gets killed, the spot is haunted.

All old houses, that stand off by themselves, and are unoccupied, generally get the reputation of being haunted. A cunjer doctor can lay haunts.

Graveyard dirt must be got off the coffin of the dead person, on the waste of the moon at midnight.

If you go through a place that is haunted, to keep from seeing the haunts and from their harming you, take your hat off and throw it behind you, then turn around to the right and take up your hat and walk fast by the place, so as not to aggravate the haunts to follow.

Spirits come in any shape, as men, cows, cats, dogs, but are always black. Some whine like a cat.

To see spirits, take a rain-crow's egg, break it in water, and wash your face in it.

To put a root with a cunjer-spell on it on the ground and let a person walk over it will hurt him.

If a man dies and leaves money buried, so that nobody knows where it is, his spirit will come back, and the color of the spirit is red.

A cunjer bag contains either devil's snuff, withworms, piece of snake-skin, some leaves or sticks tied with horsehair, black owl's feather, wing of a leather-wing bat, tail of a rat, or foot of a mole; any or all of these things may be used as needed.

To carry about the person a bone from the skeleton of a human being is proof against cunjer, but the bone must be gotten out of a grave by the person.

In excavating an Indian mound on the Savannah River, Georgia, the negroes working took each a metacarpal bone to protect them against cunjer.

If a negro finds a coat or article of dress lying nicely folded, with a stick lying on it, he will not touch it for fear of cunjer. On one occasion, where some cotton was left in the field, and thought to be cunjered, I could not get a negro to touch it. When I picked it up and put it in a basket, the spell left it, as the spell leaves after being touched by a human hand, the cunjer going to the person touching it. Cunjer can only be effectual against those of the same race. A negro cannot cunjer a white man.

To prevent a hunting dog from "running spirits," take a glass button and tie around his neck.

To stop a dog from hunting, rub an onion over his nose, and he will not trail anything; a piece of wild onion is sometimes found in a cunjer bag.

To keep witches from riding, you make an X on a Bible, and put it under your pillow.

Fish-bone is good for cunjer when swelling has occurred.

Pecune root is good for cunjer to rub with.

Any trouble that befalls a negro that he can't explain is laid at the door of "cunjer."

Many negroes say that they travel round with spirits, but they are generally considered cunjurers.

To keep from being cunjered, wear a piece of money in either shoe, or both. If you eat where any one is who you fear may cunjer you, keep a piece of silver money in your mouth while eating and drinking.

Red pepper in your shoe will prevent cunjer.

To cunjer by means of a hat, take a toad-frog dry and powder, and put the powder in the hat, or the dried toad may be put up over the door, or under steps. Toads, frogs, lizards, etc., must be all gotten at night on the waste of the moon, as that will insure a wasting away of the body.

I give an illustration of cunjer by hat and by water. While Bill Marshall, a negro, well known around Grovetown, Ga., was riding in a wagon with another negro, the latter's hat blew off. Bill Marshall picked it up, and handed it to the negro, who in a few days was taken sick and died; his death was laid at the door of Marshall. Marshall went to a well to get some water; he drank out of the bucket; a negro woman came after him, drank out of the same water, and died shortly after; the death was laid to Bill Marshall. I employed him to deaden timber in new ground; none of the negroes would have anything to do with him, but said he was a bad man, a cunjer doctor; one old negro said, "Look at tree Bill cut, die in a week." I couldn't reason the question with them; Bill could get no place to stay or cook, so I had to discharge him. He is now living in a house he built far off from his fellows, and will be forced to follow "cunjering."

Some cunjer by getting the excrement of the person to be cunjered, boring a hole in a tree, and putting the excrement in the hole, and driving a plug in tight; this will stop one up, an action on the bowels can't be had unless the tree with the plug is found, the plug taken out, and the tree cut down and burned where it stands; the smallest trees are generally selected to prevent their being found.

Some cunjer bags are made with snake-root, needles and pins, tied up with pieces of hair of the person to be cunjered in a bag of red flannel.

This mode of cunjer does not produce death, but much suffering and pain.

Sol Lockheart found a cunjer bag at his doorstep, he did not look into it, but picked it up with two sticks, and threw the bag and two sticks into the fire.

Cunjer as graveyard dirt is taken from a grave one day after burial. Negroes rarely ever go near a graveyard in daytime, never at night.

One can be cunjered by shaking hands with any one, if he has rubbed his hands with graveyard dirt.

To sprinkle graveyard dirt about the yard, about a house, makes one sleepy, sluggish, naturally waste away and perish until he dies.

Take heads of dried snake, "ground puppy," scorpion, or "toad-frog, pound them up, put in the water or victuals of any one; the "varmints," when taken into one's stomach, turn to life, and slowly eat you up, unless you can get the cunjerd taken off.

Get a hair from the mole of your head, tie it around a new ten-penny nail, and bury it with the nail head down, point up, under the doorstep. This will "run one crazy."

Roland Steiner.

GROVETOWN, GA.